



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

January 21, 2004

The Honorable Don Carlson  
Chair, Senate Higher Education Committee  
102 Irv Newhouse Building  
Post Office Box 40449  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0449

Dear Senator Carlson,

We are writing to you in support of Senate Bill 6268, relating to bringing state law into conformity with 2003 United States Supreme Court affirmative action decisions, scheduled to be heard before your committee today.

Our support for the bill proposed today stems from our interest in increasing the diversity of our health workforce as a means to address disparities in health status among Washington's increasingly diverse communities. The State Board of Health's Committee on Health Disparities found that:

- Communities of color in Washington State experience substantial inequities in terms of burden of disease.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. What is more, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State;
- Not all health care professional shortages are uniform across the state – underserved, minority and rural communities are likely to feel this shortage more acutely and for longer periods;

Because of these findings, the Board supports the goal of clarifying colleges' and universities' ability to use race and ethnicity as part of a holistic review of applicants' qualities and experiences.

A more holistic review of applicants' qualities and experiences is beneficial not just for less privileged individuals, but also for Washington as a whole. Allowing more racially and ethnically diverse youth and adults the opportunity to become part of the health workforce, through higher education, is likely to reduce health disparities through improved health care access, health care quality and health outcomes.

Sincerely,

Linda Lake, M.B.A.  
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

Vickie Ybarra, R.N., M.P.H.  
Member, Washington State Board of Health

cc: Senate Higher Education Committee Members  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Representative Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney  
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Steve Meyer, Department of Health